

FLOODING IMPACTS ON DEER

With the Mississippi River well past flood stage (43 feet today in Baton Rouge) for several weeks now, white-tailed deer are suffering some impacts. Deer in the batture areas of the state and surrounding low areas have been displaced from their home ranges and habitat and onto remaining high ground, levees, adjoining forests and agricultural areas.

Flooding is a natural occurrence and one that deer are adapted to. They readily move to other locations, following the river back down when the water level decreases. The levees make the water in the batture much deeper than it would be during most floods, but deer are strong swimmers. Fawns in Area 1, 4, and 6 along the river are not born normally until July and August, and even later in some cases.

The high water will knock the browse availability back in the flooded areas and this vegetation will take two to three weeks to begin to recover after the water finally goes down. The reduced food availability will set some deer back and force them to rely more on their body reserves until food is more available. We are well into green up and outside of the flooded areas deer can find food.

Where human development and agriculture exist, people may experience increased deer numbers on their property and suffer browsing damage to plants and shrubs. Although there is some corn already growing in the delta, most of the soybeans and cotton are not planted yet and hopefully farmers will not experience too much crop depredation. In the major agricultural areas of the state this could be a short-term concern if water levels do not subside soon.

There have been some reports of increased vehicle collisions in northeast Louisiana along the river. Drivers are cautioned to slow down in areas of high deer concentration and adjacent to flooded river areas.

Some people want to know about feeding deer. Only in extremely dire circumstances should this be considered and it is not recommended at this time. As mentioned, deer are adapted to hard times and it is usually not a good idea to interfere with nature. The best thing to do is to stay away from them and leave them alone.

Do not ride the levees to look at them, and thus possibly drive them back into the water and cause further stress. Deer in Louisiana have seen major floods before and always survived. For further information, contact your nearest District office or the Deer Program in Baton Rouge 225-765-2351 or 2344.